



Appropriations Committee

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Testimony

By

**Karen K. Buffkin
Executive Director of Employee Relations**

S.R. No. [13] Resolution Proposing Approval of a Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees and Graduate Employee Union Local 6950 - International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (GEU-UAW).

H.R. No. [12] Resolution Proposing Approval of a Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees and the Graduate Employee Union Local 6950 - International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (GEU-UAW).

Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Karen Buffkin, Executive Director of Employee Relations at the University of Connecticut. With me today are Kent Holsinger, Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of The Graduate School, and Kate Clark, Associate Director of Financial Planning to assist with any questions. We are here seeking your approval of two resolutions, Senate Resolution [13] and House Resolution [12], concerning the collective bargaining agreement between the University of Connecticut Board of Trustees and Graduate Employee Union Local 6950 - International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (GEU-UAW).

The GEU-UAW represents approximately 2,200 Graduate Assistants ("GAs") assigned to the Storrs and regional campuses at Avery Point, Hartford, Stamford, and Waterbury. GAs are graduate students who are also employed as Teaching Assistants or Research Assistants at the University of Connecticut. Slightly less than one third of the University of Connecticut's 7,000 graduate students are GAs. While playing important roles in classrooms and laboratories, GAs gain valuable experience as part of their own graduate education and in preparation for their careers. They receive stipends, waiver of tuition and some fees, and subsidized health insurance; as such, assistantships are sought after. The ability to offer attractive GA appointments in the

admission process is one factor that enables the University of Connecticut to recruit highly qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds to its graduate programs.

GAs are not funded by the state appropriations allotted for the University of Connecticut. They are primarily funded by research grants and tuition dollars. Therefore, no additional support is requested from the state to fund this Agreement, and there is no impact to the state's general fund. This bargaining unit is not part of the statewide SEBAC coalition.

This four-year Agreement is the culmination of collective bargaining that began in November of 2021 and represents the third contract between GEU-UAW and the University, which would become effective on July 1, 2022. The University's goals throughout the negotiations were to negotiate a fair and economically responsible contract; retain flexibility in the administration of the Agreement; maintain and enhance academic excellence and diversity in graduate education, with high standards for student scholarship and teaching performance; enable faculty to continue teaching and mentoring GAs in ways appropriate to their disciplines; and continue to provide fair treatment of GAs relative to their counterparts at research universities across the nation with regard to pay, healthcare, and opportunity. The Union made proposals during the negotiations to, among other things, increase wages; eliminate all student fees; increase the childcare fund; provide protections against bullying; expand rights of international GAs; expand Relocation policies/procedures to GAs; provide enhanced GA onboarding; and limit housing costs for GAs.

The parties negotiated across-the-board stipend increases of 4 percent for the first two years, 3.5 percent for the third year, and 3 percent for the fourth year (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2026), while the contribution to health care premiums for GAs electing individual coverage will increase in year one and year three by \$20. With respect to fees, we reached a compromise in which GAs continue to receive some relief from fees but much less than the complete waiver that the Union sought in bargaining. Other key elements of our Agreement include:

- Child Care Fund: Increases the fund from \$160,000 to \$225,000 per fiscal year, with the continuance of no rollover of unexpended funds.
- Non-Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment: Includes protections against bullying and provides clear examples of behaviors that could constitute bullying.
- International GA Rights: Establishes that the University will make reasonable efforts to employ a GA who previously was unable to be lawfully employed by the University due to immigration status.
- Onboarding: Establishes that the University will provide GA onboarding resources, through a dedicated portal.

We believe that the proposed agreement will help the University maintain a competitive and productive GA workforce. We respectfully ask the Committee's approval. Thank you for your consideration and continued support of the University of Connecticut. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.